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Don't Disturb the Humans

OC OC

A quick one-shot.

Don't Disturb the Humans

Karlan sat near the fire in the local pub. The fur on his snout was going white and patches were going thin along his back. It took longer to make the trip up the hill to the pub now. But, here at a table with a brew - in a comfortable chair with a warm fire - he was content.

As he sat, he idly listened to the chatter from the group at the next table. The youngsters, caught in that awkward stage between cub and adult, were heatedly debating humans. His long ears perked when he heard one, Trisal – if he remembered correctly – say, “Well, Old Karlan here has met humans!”

“Blatcrap,” a dark-furred one replied, “No one here has actually seen a human.” He half-turned to look at Karlan, “Especially not that old one!”

“It's true,” Trisal insisted, “Karlan met humans!”

The other turned back to Karlan, “Old one, is it true? Have you met a human?”

Karlan regarded the young Sharlite for a moment before replying, “Sort of.”

“Sort of? Sort of? That's a yes-or-no question,” the dark-furred one said with a snort.

“Some questions aren't that easy to answer,” Karlan replied.

“I tell you what,” the dark-furred one said, “Give us a story and we'll refresh your brew.”

“Only if you come join me by the fire,” Karlan replied, motioning to the empty seats at his table.

The other Sharlites all joined him, one bringing a chair. The dark-furred one brought fresh brews for everyone.

With everyone settled, the dark-furred one asked, “Tell us what you know of humans, old one.”

"What I know of humans, young one," Karlan replied evenly, "Is this – leave them alone."

"Leave them alone?" the dark-furred one snorted, "That's it?"

"Now Sharnat," Trisal spoke to the dark-furred one, "Let's hear what he has to say." He turned to Karlan, "I would like to hear your tale." The others murmured in agreement.

Karlan took a drink from his brew. "All right," he agreed. "It was when I was not much older than you lot. I was the junior bridge officer on the *Far Light*, a mid-class combat ship."

"And now you were in Fleet, too," Sharnat observed with disdain.

"It's true, Sharnat," another of the group said, "My grand-sire served with him. Now be quiet, I want to hear this."

Karlan continued, "As I was saying, I was on the bridge of the *Far Light*, we were part of a light battle group on a long patrol out of our space. We had been out about six weeks, jumping from system to system, when we came upon them."

He leaned forward, "Two mid-sized fleets engaged in a battle. We had come in at the edge of the system and they were focused on themselves, so we were able to observe them without being detected."

"The two fleets were composed of similar vessels. Ugly, functional things – not like the sleek lines of the *Far Light*. Calculations of their efficiency determined our battle group was about evenly matched with either one."

Karlan sat back and took a long drink - setting the tankard down, he continued, "The Fleet Leader and Ship Leaders all met over comms to discuss this development. After a quick debate, they reached an agreement, and our Ship Leader briefed the bridge crew with our new orders."

"The two fleets were both human. One was from a colony in the system we were in. The second was from another colony several systems away. Our Leaders decided to take advantage of this opportunity and attack the second colony while their fleet was engaged in the system we were in. Our fleet carried ground forces and we figured we could hold it against the remains of their fleet."

The others around the table, even Sharnat, had fallen quiet – engrossed by the tale.

"We jumped to the second colony and began our attack. I coordinated with two other ships in a long-distance bombardment of their orbital defenses so we could open a corridor for our ground troops. Long distance attacks take time and we saw several small ships lift from the planet and disappear as the defenses slowly fell."

“At last, we opened a corridor, and the fleet began maneuvering in to deploy the troops. I continued targeting the remaining defenses and we began to engage ground defenses as well. Everything was going smoothly until one of the other officers, the one at the secondary scans, called out, ‘Ship Leader, I have contacts!’”

The others at the table all leaned forward, eager to hear.

“A group of ships had jumped in behind us, coming in fast. A large fleet, they were a significantly superior force. They sent a message, and our Ship Leader displayed it on the main viewer. We saw a human ship’s bridge. It looked fairly standard with a ring of consoles surrounding a central command station. The entire bridge was human with no other species visible. The one at the command station spoke, ‘Enemy fleet, you are attacking a human colony. Surrender or be destroyed.’”

“What happened?” Sharnat asked eagerly.

“Some fool on one of our ships launched weapons,” Karlan replied, “The humans responded with a hail of missiles. We did the only sane thing, we ran.”

“You deserted?” another in the group, eyes wide in disbelief, spoke up.

“We ran. The *Far Light* and another ship both broke and ran for the edge of the planet’s gravity well so we could jump the hell out of there,” Karlan lowered his head. “Both Ship Leaders were forced to retire when we got back, but we survived.”

“Wow,” Trisal said quietly.

“Yeh, I’m not proud of it,” Karlan said taking a drink, “But we survived.”

“And the other ships?” Sharnat asked.

“They didn’t,” Karlan replied flatly.

“Is that why you don’t poke humans?” Sharnat asked, slightly awestruck.

“No,” Karlan answered, “Any superior fleet could have done that. No, its who they were.”

Trisal asked, “Who were they?”

“After we were back in hyperspace, we analyzed the data,” Karlan said. “The ships? They were the ones attacking each other in the other system. Several of the ships were still venting atmosphere from battle damage.”

The others around the table sat back with mild exclamations.

"Yep, two human fleets at war with each other jumped in together just to break our tails," Karlan paused for another drink before continuing. "But that's not the strangest thing," Karlan said. "No, the strangest thing was what we saw analyzing the data from just before we jumped out."

"What did you see?" Sharnat asked.

"The rest of our fleet were reduced to drifting wrecks from the missile barrage. With our fleet gone, the humans turned and began firing on each other again."

"And that, my young friends," Karlan stated, "Is why I say – don't mess with humans."

-----The End